An Acute Gastroenteritis Outbreak of Unknown Etiology Associated with Montana Mike's Steakhouse — McPherson County, May 2008



McPherson County Health Department

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Background

On May 31, 2008, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), Office of Surveillance and Epidemiology (OSE) was notified by the KDHE Bureau of Consumer Health (BCH) of a possible foodborne illness outbreak at Montana Mike's Steakhouse, 2211 E. Kansas Ave., in McPherson, Kansas. Several patrons developed acute onset of nausea and vomiting after eating at the restaurant on May 30 and May 31. Because many of the patrons were exhibiting symptoms of illness while still at the restaurant and because the etiology of the illness was uncertain, the owner of the establishment closed the restaurant on the evening of May 31 in order to thoroughly clean the facility. The restaurant reopened on June 1. On June 2, KDHE and the McPherson County Health Department initiated an outbreak investigation to determine the cause of illnesses and to provide prevention and control measures.

Methods

Epidemiologic

Staff from the local health department conducted preliminary interviews with individuals who initially reported symptoms. To determine if illness was associated with a specific menu item, a case-control study was conducted among patrons of Montana Mike's who ate at the restaurant from May 29 to June 1, 2008. A questionnaire was developed and interviews with the cases and controls were administered by telephone by staff of the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) program housed in the KDHE Office of Health Promotion. Controls for the study were well meal companions of ill individuals identified by the local health department and patrons from credit card receipts provided by the owner.

A case was initially defined as a patron who dined at Montana Mike's from May 27 to June 1 and subsequently became ill with vomiting or diarrhea (3 or more loose stools within a 24-hour period) within 24 hours. However, for the case control study, a case was defined as a patron who dined at Montana Mike's from May 29 to June 1 and developed vomiting or diarrhea (3 or more loose stools within a 24-hour period) within 24 hours. A control was defined as a patron who dined at Montana Mike's from May 29 to June 1 and did not develop any gastrointestinal symptoms within 24 hours.

Four controls were randomly selected and matched to one case by date of exposure to the restaurant. Descriptive analyses and univariate conditional logistic regression were performed in SAS 9.1 to assess food exposures that were significantly associated with illness.

Laboratory

No clinical specimens were collected from ill persons for microbiological testing. No food samples were available for collection and testing.

Environmental

An inspection of the restaurant was conducted by KDHE-BCH on June 1. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to all employees at the facility to assess for illness, work history, and food consumption history.

Results

Epidemiologic

Case Finding

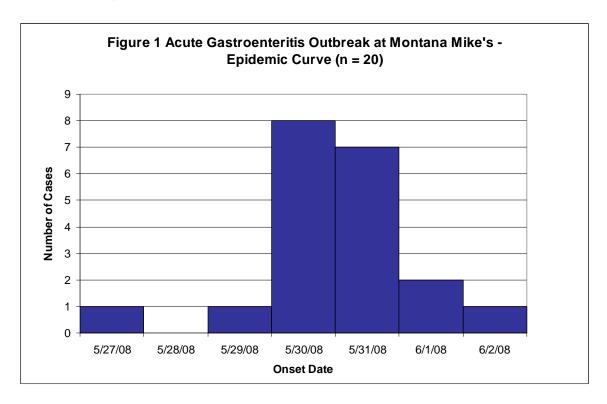
A total of 191 individuals were interviewed. Twenty individuals reported illness (10%). Nausea and diarrhea were the most frequently reported symptoms followed by vomiting, abdominal cramps, headache, and muscle aches (Table 1). Only one individual reported seeking medical care for their illness. Fourteen of the cases were female (70%).

Table 1: Clinical Information of Cases (n=20)

Symptoms	Number (%)*
Nausea	14 (74 %)
Diarrhea	14 (70 %)
Vomiting	13 (65 %)
Abdominal Cramps	12 (60 %)
Headache	5 (28 %)
Muscle Aches	3 (16 %)

^{*}Symptom information was incomplete for some cases.

Onset dates of illness ranged from May 27 to June 2 (Figure 1). The incubation period ranged from 15 minutes to 14.5 hours, with a median of 50 minutes.



Case Control Study

One hundred seventy-one respondents met the control definition. Of those, 72 (42%) were randomly selected and matched to cases by date of exposure. Two individuals, who dined at the restaurant before May 30, were excluded from the case-control study because they could not be matched by date of exposure to any controls.

The distribution of sex and age for both cases and controls included in the study are shown in Table 2.

Cases (n=18) Controls (n=72) **Total (n=90)** No. (%) No. (%) Sex Female 13 (72) 41(57) 54 (60) Male 5 (28) 31(43) 36 (40) Age (yrs) 1 - 88Range 2 - 851 - 88Median 44 40 40

Table 2 Characteristics of study population

Categories of menu items were analyzed for association with illness. Of those, eating any type of salad including garden salad, garden salad with cheese and bacon, or an entrée salad approached statistical significance. When type of dressing was analyzed, consuming ranch dressing was significantly associated with illness (table 3).

Table 3: Exposure Information

Menu Category	Adjusted OR	95% CI	P value
Appetizer	0.41	0.08 - 2.14	0.29
Entrée Salad	0.66	0.19 - 2.34	0.52
Steak Dinner	1.18	0.20 - 7.10	0.86
Seafood Dinner	0.99	0.06 - 17.00	0.99
Favorite Dinner	1.01	0.15 - 6.71	0.99
Burger or Sandwich	2.29	0.11 - 48.97	0.60
Kids Meal	1.31	0.09 - 18.30	0.84
Side Dish	0.61	0.04 - 9.80	0.73
Any Salad	4.40	0.89 - 21.71	0.06
Dressing			
Ranch	5.43	1.32 - 22.39	0.019
Dorothy Lynch	5.92	0.41 - 85.55	0.192
Thousand Island	2.32	0.20 - 26.94	0.502
Bleu Cheese	5.92	0.73 - 47.72	0.095

Environmental

One critical violation was noted during the environmental inspection: an unclean food contact surface. However, prior to the inspection of the establishment, the restaurant had been closed, cleaned thoroughly, and food that was served on May 30 and May 31 was discarded. Of the forty-five employees who completed the employee questionnaire, five employees reported symptoms. Onset dates of illness ranged from May 27 to June 1. Of the employees who reported illness, two of the five had consumed ranch dressing prior to their illness. It is unknown if the other three employees consumed ranch dressing prior to their illness. The ranch dressing served at the restaurant is prepared in-house by staff and contains buttermilk, ranch seasoning and mayonnaise.

Discussion

This was an outbreak of acute gastroenteritis associated with a restaurant. The epidemiologic and clinical data collected during this outbreak are consistent with a point-source outbreak. The short incubation period and clinical symptoms are indicative of a bacterial intoxication possibly caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*. Intoxication by *S. aureus* is characterized by an abrupt onset of vomiting and/or diarrhea with symptoms occurring within a few minutes to eight hours after ingestion of the toxin-contaminated food. Statistical analysis revealed that consumption of ranch dressing was significantly associated with illness, but exactly how or when the homemade dressing became contaminated is unknown. Because no human specimens or food samples were available for laboratory testing, KDHE was unable to confirm the causative agent of this outbreak. *Staphylococcus* food intoxication is the most common type of food intoxication. *S. aureus* contamination can occur when someone handles food with bare hands, especially after touching the face or mouth, or has an exposed sore on hands or arms. Staphylococci are present in the nasal passages and throats and on the hair and skin of 50 percent or more of healthy individuals¹. Foods commonly implicated in foodborne disease outbreaks caused by *S. aureus* include salad dressing, creamy, non-lettuce salads, cream-filled bakery products, sandwiches, and dairy-based products¹.

To prevent the growth of *S. aureus* and the production of enterotoxins, ready to eat foods should be held at appropriate cold holding temperatures ($< 42^{\circ}$ C) to ensure that no toxin build up occurs. Proper food handling should also be implemented, including good hand washing before handling food and having minimal bare hand contact with food.

Acknowledgments – Local Health Department Staff and Office of Health Promotion Health Risk Studies Program Staff

Appendix A - Montana Mike's Outbreak Investigation Questionannaire

Reported by: Sheri Anderson and Titilayo Aghoghovbia

¹ FDA, Foodborne Pathogenic Microorganisms and Natural Toxins Handbook, September 1999 http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/intro.html.

5

Our Vision and Mission

As the state's environmental protection and public health agency, KDHE promotes responsible choices to protect the health and environment for all Kansans.

Through education, direct services, and the assessment of data and trends, coupled with policy development and enforcement, KDHE will improve health and quality of life. We prevent injuries, illness, and foster a safe and sustainable environment for the people of Kansas.

Appendix A

Kansas Department of Health and Environment Foodborne Illness Outbreak Investigation

Hello. My name is [YOUR NAME], and I am calling from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. We are working with the McPherson County Health Department to investigate gastrointestinal illnesses among persons who may have eaten at Montana Mike's in McPherson from Thursday, May 29 through Sunday, June 1. To help with our investigation the restaurant owner has provided us a list of names of persons believed to have eaten at Montana Mike's during this time period. I am calling for [PATRON NAME].

Is he or she available?

If YES: Proceed to next paragraph when speaking with identified patron.

If **NO**: Is there a time that would be convenient for me to call back?

If YES: Record on Tracking Sheet.

If NO: Leave message for patron to return call to 866-445-1429.

[Repeat if necessary when speaking with correct PATRON: My name is [YOUR NAME], and I am calling from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. We are working with the McPherson County Health Department to investigate gastrointestinal illnesses among persons who may have eaten at Montana Mike's in McPherson from Thursday, May 29 through Sunday, June 1. To help with our investigation the restaurant owner has provided us a list of names of persons believed to have eaten at Montana Mike's during this time period.]

To determine the cause of illness and to prevent future occurrences, we are collecting information from individuals who became ill as well as those that did NOT become ill. Your participation is completely voluntary, and any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential.

or Sunday, June 1?	□ No	7 29, or Friday, N	Alay 30, or Saturday, May 3.
1. Last Name:	First Na	ame:	2 .
Phone:()			
3. County:	4. Age:	Years	5. Sex: □ Male □
6. What date and time did you eat a a.m. p.m.	at Montana Mi	ke's? Date/_	/ Time: □
Now we will ask about menu items	that you consu	med at Montana	Mike's.
7. Did you eat any appetizers?	☐ Yes	☐ No	If no, skip to question 8
Please check each menu item the int	erviewee had ed	aten	
Onion Rings	☐ Yes	□ No	Don't know
Boneless Buffalo Wings	☐ Yes	□ No	Don't know
Mountain Stuffed Mushrooms	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know
Fried Mushrooms	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Fried Zucchini	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Cheese Fries	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Potato Boats	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Chili Nachos	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know

8. Did you have any Entrée salads? [☐ Yes [□ No	if no, skip to question 9
Please check each menu item the inte	erviewee had ed	aten	
Dinner Salad	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Dinner Salad with Chicken Tenders	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Dinner Salad with Chicken Breast	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know
Dinner Salad with Grilled Shrimp	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Dinner Salad with Sirloin Steak	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Chicken Tostada Salad	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Buffalo Chicken Salad	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Chicken Caesar Salad	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
What dressing did you have on your		_ 1.0	
salad?	·		
	-	-	
· ·		□ No	if no skip to question 10
Please check each menu item the inte			
Top Sirloin Steak	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Mike's Big Montana Steak	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Kansas City Strip	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Filet Mignon	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know
Ribeye Steak	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know
Cracked Peppercorn Sirloin	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
The '44' Sirloin	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Porterhouse	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Rancher's T-Bone	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Mushroom and Garlic Studded Ribeye	e 🖵 Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
10. Did you have a Combination Dir		□ No	if no skip to question 11
Please check each menu item the inte			
Steak and Shrimp	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
BBQ Chicken and Ribs	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Steak and Ribs	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
11. Did you have Seafood? ☐ Yes	□ No		if no skip to question 12
Please check each menu item the inte			
Grilled Shrimp	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Fried Shrimp	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Fried Catfish Strips	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know
Glazed Salmon	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know
Trout	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
12. Did you have an Other Favorite		□ No	if no skip to question 13
Please check each menu item the inte			
Pork Chops	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Mountain Topper – Chopped Sirloin	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Mountain Topper – Grilled Chicken	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Chicken Pasta Alfredo	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Italiano Chicken Pasta	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Kabobs	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know

Chicken Fried Sirloin Steak	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
BBQ Ribs	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Chicken Tenders	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Teriyaki Glazed Chicken	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Grilled Chicken Breast	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Chopped Sirloin Steak	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Beef Tips	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
13. Did you have the Burgers or S question 14	andwiches?	☐ Yes ☐ I	No if no skip to
Please check each menu item the in	nterviewee had	d eaten	
Grilled Chicken Breast	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Bacon Swiss Mushroom Burger	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Summit Burger	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Hamburger	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
BBQ Chicken	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know
Hickory Burger	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know
Ribeye Steak Sandwich	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Mountain Burger	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Roadhouse Grilled Chicken	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know
Chicken Fried Sirloin Sandwich	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know
Buffalo Burger	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
14. Did you have anything from the	na kid's manu	? □ Yes	☐ No if no skip to
question 15	ie kiu s ilieliu	🗀 165	□ NO ij no skip io
Please check each menu item the it	nterviewee had	d eaten	
Hamburger	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Cheeseburger	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Chicken Strips	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Mini Corndogs	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know
Grilled Cheese Sandwich	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
15. What sides did you have with	•		
Please check each menu item the in			_
Baked Potato	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Loaded Baked Potato	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
French Fries	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Mashed Potatoes	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Sweet Potato	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Steamed Veggies Gran Boons	☐ Yes ☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Green Beans Cottage Cheese Salad	☐ Yes	□ No □ No	☐ Don't know☐ Don't know
Garden Salad	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
Loaded Garden Salad	☐ Yes	□ No	☐ Don't know
What dressing did you have on		— 110	_ Don t know
your salad?			

Cinnamon Apple Slices	☐ Yes	☐ No		Don't know
Sliced Mushrooms	☐ Yes	□ No		Don't know
Garlic Toast	☐ Yes	☐ No		Don't know
16. Did you have any desse question 17	ert?	☐ Yes	□ No	if no skip to
Please check each menu ite	m the interviewee had	l eaten		
White Chocolate Cheesecak	e	□ No		Don't know
Chocolate cake	☐ Yes	□ No		Don't know
Rocky Mountain Mudslide	☐ Yes	□ No		Don't know
Carrot Cake	☐ Yes	☐ No		Don't know
17. Did you consume any of If yes, please list	other food items at M		☐ Ye	s 🗖 No
18. What did you drink?	☐ Water	☐ Ice Tea	☐ Pep	osi 🔲 Diet Pepsi
☐ Sierra Mist Beer	☐ Mountain Dew	☐ Dr. Pepper	☐ Cof	ffee
☐ Bottle Beer	☐ Draft Beer	☐ Wine	☐ Mix	ked Drink (Grand
Teton Ice Tea, Helena Ice T	ea, Margarita, other)	☐ Othe		`
20. Did you use any other	condiments or dressin	ng on your food?		
21. Did any of your food of If yes, did the food		taste?	☐ Yes	□ No
☐ Metallic ☐ Ac		□ Sour	☐ Alcoholic	□ Sweet □
•				
	or drink item?			
22. Did any food or drink: If yes, please descri What was the food	item have an unusual be the odor? or drink item?			
~	nave an unusual textu be the texture or colo or drink item?	r?		
24. Did you become ill aft drank?	er you ate or	Yes	□ No →	If no, skip to 32
25. When did you start fee	eling ill? Date	//		: 🗆 a.m. 🗅

Stomach cramps?	
Vomiting?	
Stomach cramps?	
Diarrhea?(more than 3 loose stools in a	
24 hour period) How many stools in a 24 hour period? Bloody diarrhea?	
Bloody diarrhea?	now
Muscle Aches?	now
Headache?	
Yes	
If yes, highest temperature?°F Please indicate any other symptoms:°F 28. Did you see a doctor or other healthcare professional for this illness? □ Ye If yes, provide name and phone number:	
Please indicate any other symptoms: 28. Did you see a doctor or other healthcare professional for this illness?	now
28. Did you see a doctor or other healthcare professional for this illness?	
If yes, provide name and phone number: 29. Were you hospitalized? If yes, where? 30. Was a clinical specimen collected? Type of Specimen: Date Collected: 31. Are you still ill? If no, when did you recover? Date Time The next few questions will ask about other persons who ate with you at Montana Midike to interview everyone who lives in your household and ate at Montana Mike's on 29, or Friday, May 30, or Saturday, May 31, or Sunday, June 1.	
Type of Specimen: Date Collected: 31. Are you still ill? Yes No Time If no, when did you recover? Date Time The next few questions will ask about other persons who ate with you at Montana Miklike to interview everyone who lives in your household and ate at Montana Mike's on 29, or Friday, May 30, or Saturday, May 31, or Sunday, June 1.	
31. Are you still ill?	
If no, when did you recover? Date Time The next few questions will ask about other persons who ate with you at Montana Mike to interview everyone who lives in your household and ate at Montana Mike's on 29, or Friday, May 30, or Saturday, May 31, or Sunday, June 1.	
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ike to interview everyone who lives in your household and ate at Montana Mike's on 29, or Friday, May 30, or Saturday, May 31, or Sunday, June 1.	
32. How many other people, not including yourself, were in your dining party for	n Thursday, I
meals that you had at Montana Mike's? people (If = '0' skip to Q43; If '1 or more' go to Q33)	
33. How many of the people, who ate with you at Montana Mike's, live in your h	household?
(If '0' skip to Q42; If '1 or more' ask for their names and then go to Q34)	

Please prov	vide me v	with their nam	nes:			
#1		#4_			#7	
#2						
#3						
34. Are any of the		you have nai If 'No' go to	•	rears of age?	☐ Yes	□ No
35. May we ask yo	ou the sa	ame question	s about their fo	ood exposures a	and illness inf	formation?
(If 'Yes' co	nduct a s	separate inter	view for each c	hild; If 'No' go t	o Q36)	
36. Are any of the	people	you have nar	ned between 12	2 and 17 years	of age? □ Ye	s 🖵 No
(If 'Yes' go	o to Q37,	; If 'No' go to	(Q39)			
37. May we ask h	im or he	er the same q	uestions about	their food expo	sures and ill	ness
information?						
			☐ Yes	□ No		
(If 'Yes' co	nduct a s	separate inter	view for each c	hild; If 'No' go t	o Q38)	
38. May we ask yo	ou the sa	ame question	s about their fo	ood exposures a	nd illness inf	formation?
		•	☐ Yes	□No		
(If 'Yes' co	nduct a s	separate inter	view for each c	hild; If 'No' go t	to Q39)	
39. Are any of the	people	you have nai	ned 18 years of	f age and older	? • Yes	☐ No
(If 'Yes' go	to Q40;	If 'No' go to	Q42)			
(If 'Yes', go	ds to be a #1 #2 #3 #4 #5 #6 #7 #8 #9	asked for all p □ Yes	persons named of No N	Alternate tir Alternate tir Alternate tir Alternate tir Alternate tir Alternate tir Alternate tir Alternate tir Alternate tir Alternate tir	ne to call:	
41. May I speak v		person?				
	#1 #2	☐ Yes ☐ Yes	□ No □ No			
	#3	☐ Yes	☐ No			
	#4	☐ Yes	☐ No			

	#5	☐ Yes	☐ No			
	#6	☐ Yes	☐ No			
	#7	☐ Yes	☐ No			
	#8	☐ Yes	☐ No			
	#9	— 105	☐ No			
(If 'Yes', c	onduct a	separate inte	rview for th	is person; If 'No'	' go to Q42)	
42. Will you provin your household		ontact infort	mation for		our dining party who o l No	lo not live
Name				_ Phone:	Ill 🗖 Yes	☐ No
Name				Phone:	Ill 🛭 Yes	☐ No
Name				Phone:	Ill 🗖 Yes	☐ No
Name				Phone:	Ill 🗖 Yes	☐ No
Name				Phone:	Ill □ Yes	☐ No
Name				Phone:	Ill 🖵 Yes	☐ No
43. Do you have	other co	mments or in	nformation	you would like t	to share?	
Thank you for yo	our coope	eration. This	s informatic	on will help us d	etermine the cause of i	illness and

13

prevent future occurrences.